

Appendix C. Staff Interview Questions

We have assembled some staff interview questions to help the reviewer target problem areas during a program review. The interviewing process is important because it can identify problems and systemic deficiencies not readily apparent in a file review alone. They are not intended to be all inclusive as there are many different questions a reviewer may ask, and the interview process will differ based upon the type of institution which is being reviewed. Some institutions may have a number of persons working in many different departments, while smaller institutions may administer most of their Title IV work through the financial aid office. The reviewer must use her/his professional judgement in the type of questions being asked, and expand the questioning when necessary to follow up on areas of concern disclosed by the answers to other questions. We hope these questions will serve as a guide to the staff interview process.

It is important to note that all interviews must be completely documented for future reference in a program review report or to support any administrative action taken against an institution.

Staff Interview Questions (Cont'd)

ACADEMIC OR EDUCATION PERSONNEL/REGISTRAR QUESTIONS

Name _____

Position/Title _____

Award years in position _____

Date/Time of Interview _____

(Ask them to show attendance documents and explain codes and how records are kept. Request policies and procedures manual & other documents, as needed. Keep track of any additional documents requested.)

The following questions are suggested for this interview process:

Describe your job duties.

Describe the institution's programs in terms of their length (months, weeks, units/hours, & hours per week).

Are all of your courses accredited and licensed?

How is your academic year defined?

What is the school's attendance policy? Are students dropped after a number of absences? If so, what number is that?

How and when is it enforced?

Who makes the final decisions regarding terminations for attendance problems (if applicable)?
Are exceptions documented?

Who keeps attendance records and how often (daily, weekly, monthly?)

Does the attendance policy or attendance probation (if applicable) relate to financial aid?

Are excused absences allowed? How much or what percentage?

SATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PROGRESS POLICY

1. **What is the school's general SAP policy?** (include appeals for mitigating circumstances)
2. **Quantitative** _____
Qualitative _____
(for different programs?)
3. **Maximum time-frame (different programs)?**
4. **When/how often is SAP checked/verified (different programs)?**
5. **What is the probationary period?** Do students get financial aid while on probation?

Staff Interview Questions (Cont'd)

ACADEMIC OR EDUCATION PERSONNEL/REGISTRAR QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

6. **What is the school's policy on repeats and remedial courses?**
7. **When are students terminated? When can they re-enroll? How is this handled?**
8. **What are the appeal procedures? Is there established criteria for approving/denying appeals?**

For programs without academic terms, how is the midpoint determined for Pell disbursements (different programs)?

If the school has externships, how is attendance monitored during this time?

Are there any other sites or locations in which instruction is given?

What is the school's LOA policy? What procedures are followed to grant an LOA?

How does the school determine the last day of attendance for unofficial withdrawals?

How/when are no-show's identified?

How are the appropriate offices notified of student's withdrawal, and last date of attendance (LDA)?

Are students charged for exceeding their contracted hours? (Clock hour schools)

What is the school's withdrawal rate? _____ How is this determined? (need back-up documents)

What information do you share and coordinate with the financial aid office (prior schooling)?

Do you maintain a separate academic file for each student?

Is there any special designation for students who are not eligible to apply for Title IV (eg. foreign, non-matriculated) on student data bases?

Are there any consortium agreements or contracts with other schools?

What is the school's clock-to-credit hour conversion ratio? (if applicable)

Staff Interview Questions (Cont'd)

ADMISSIONS PERSONNEL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Name _____

Position/Title _____

Award years in position _____

Date/Time of Interview _____

(Ask them to show you the forms associated with the admissions process from an actual file. Request policies and procedures manual & other documents during the interview. Keep track of any additional documents requested.)

The following questions are suggested for this interview process:

Describe the admissions process: If I am a student interested in going to school, how do I find out about your school? Then what happens?

How are students recruited? Do you have commissioned admissions rep's (ie. retention-based bonus)?

Describe programs in terms of their length (months, weeks, units/hours)

What information is requested on the admissions application? (past schools?)

Could you give us an idea of what types of students typically enroll in your programs? (population characteristics such as h.s. graduate, age, gender, U.S. citizens or not, AFDC recipients, JTPA, vocational rehabilitation, transfers, restarts, etc.)

If students are enrolling in ESL courses and their English is poor, how do you help them fill out forms which are written in English? Who helps with Financial Aid forms?

ABILITY-TO-BENEFIT

1. ATB test used _____
2. Does the licensing/accrediting bodies specific which ATB tests are approved?
3. How many parts are there for the ATB test and are all parts administered?
4. Passing scores for different programs?
5. Retake policy?
6. Who administers the ATB test? (one or more? _____)
7. How is that person paid? (need copies of pay documentation and contracts)

8. Who keeps the original test answer sheets?
9. How are test results reported by the independent tester?

Staff Interview Questions (Cont'd)

ADMISSIONS PERSONNEL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

10. Do admissions representatives or any school employee ever administer ATB tests?
11. Do the admissions representatives have access to test questions and answers?
12. Are students ever counseled in strategies for passing the test?
13. Passing scores for different programs?
14. What GED program is available for ATB students?

(SEE THE INDEPENDENT ATB ADMINISTRATOR QUESTIONS)

Additional admissions requirements for certain programs?

Please describe the programs -- length, clock or credit hours, etc. & tuition and fees.

What sort of consumer information is given to students prior to enrollment?

When do students register in relation to their program's start date?

How frequently do starts occur (different programs)?

What is the school's enrollment? _____ % On Financial aid? _____ %?

What hours/days do the students attend school? (part and full-time)

Are there any other locations besides this location in which students are taught?

Is a separate admissions file kept on each student?

At what point would a prospective student find out about financial aid?

What financial aid information do admissions reps give?

What coordination of information occurs between admissions and financial aid?

Is admissions data entered onto any integrated computerized data base?

Describe any remedial programs.

For students enrolled in ESL-only programs, how are pre-existing job skills documented ?

Are any high school students admitted into the program?

Who verifies high school graduation for students who applied prior to finishing high school, and how is this accomplished?

*Staff Interview Questions (Cont'd)***INDEPENDENT ATB ADMINISTRATOR QUESTIONS**

Name _____

Position/Title _____

Award years in position _____

Date/Time of Interview _____

This is a compilation of suggested questions for the independent test administrator. This is not a script of questions you must ask, it is only a guide of some issues you may want to address with the tester. Many of these questions address procedures (such as verifying students' ID's) that are not required by ED. However, the answers you get may provide some insight into the school's ATB process.

Did you have any previous testing background before working for this school?

How did you and the school get together?

Describe any prior affiliations or relationships with any officers of the school.

Do you have a written contract with the school? Please provide a copy.

Describe the test requirements. (e.g., whether test is timed, whether different versions of tests should be used for retests, number of times student can retake test).

Explain the ATB testing process at the school.

Is the complete test given?

Explain any procedures you may have for checking the identity of individuals taking the test (make sure "ringers" aren't being sent in to take the test).

What test is used?

Explain the testing procedures. Is the test constantly monitored? What happens if you must leave the room while the test is going on?

Are students charged for the test?

What is the passing score(s) for the test? Is this based on the test developer's standards (and ED's criteria), or did the school determine the passing score?

Some tests allow the tester to add or subtract points from the students' scores based on circumstances (e.g., age, test environment). What, if any, adjustments do you make?

How do you notify the school of the students' test results?

Who keeps the original copy of the test?

Do you keep an independent record of who was tested, and the scores for each student? If so, please give us a copy.

Staff Interview Questions (Cont'd)

INDEPENDENT ATB ADMINISTRATOR QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

Have you had any cases of students cheating on the test (e.g., copying from other students)?
What did/would you do in such a case? Is there an agreed-upon procedure with the school?

Have you ever had cases where you found students who had the test answers (crib sheets)?
If so, how did the students get the answers?

Have students ever mentioned receiving counselling to help them pass the test?

Does school personnel have access to the test answers?

Describe any procedures or guidelines for invalidating students' test scores? (Some large testing companies have procedures for monitoring retests, and call for invalidating test results if students score significantly higher on retests.)

Have you met the requirements of the test publisher as a proctor? (Wonderlic requires the test proctors to be certified by their company prior to administering their test.)

Staff Interview Questions (Cont'd)

FINANCIAL AID PERSONNEL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Name _____

Position/Title _____

Award years in position _____

Date/Time of Interview _____

(Ask them to show forms used from an actual student's file. Request policies and procedures manual. Keep track of any additional documents requested. Ask for changes between award years.)

The following questions are suggested for this interview process:

General responsibilities in Title IV administration and functions of different employees in the financial aid office: Please describe the financial aid process chronologically (open-ended question).

What has to happen in order for a student to get financial aid once they decide to go to your school?

Describe process before aid is disbursed: application for financial aid, FAT requests, needs analysis, budget determination, award letters, receipt of Student Aid Report(SAR)/Electronic SAR (ESAR) (on EDE?), student signatures, loan counseling, etc.

Describe verification policies and procedures. (Check for written policies and procedures)

Explain the ESAR process. When are ESAR certifications signed?

If only comment codes are printed on the ESAR, does everyone have the explanation of codes?

What is the role of the servicer (if applicable)?

Which needs analysis is used? Were there different needs analysis for different award years?
When is it used and for what purposes?

How does the school define its academic year for financial aid purposes?

What is the school's campus-based awarding philosophy? How is aid packaged?

Which students receive FSEOG? (Pell eligible, lowest FC?)

Does the institution award financial aid for indirect living expenses?

What is included in the Federal Pell Grant budgets or cost of attendance for the different programs? (Beginning with the 1993-94 award year, a single budget is used for the Pell and FFEL programs)

For campus-based and FFEL, when would the data elements that affect the EFC be adjusted?

Staff Interview Questions (Cont'd)

FINANCIAL AID PERSONNEL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

Is backup documentation maintained for students listed on the FISAP income grid? (May be with the fiscal officer, depending on who completes the FISAP)

Who completes the Student Status Confirmation Reports (SSCR)? Where are they maintained?

How does the financial aid office communicate or receive information from other offices such as admissions, academic or education department, placement, etc.?

Is there or was there any problems with the school's Title IV administration that we should know about?

How are files kept? (Academic, admissions, attendance, financial aid, placement?)

*****Request that the financial aid officer walk through a student's file with you to become familiarized with their forms.*****

SATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PROGRESS (SAP) POLICY - FINANCIAL AID PURPOSES

*** How is midpoint determined for Pell (different programs)?**

*** What is the school's attendance policy as it relates to financial aid?**

*** How often is SAP checked/verified (for different programs)?**

*** What is the probationary period? Do students get financial aid on probation?**

*** What are the appeals procedures for mitigating circumstances?**

*** What is the school's policy on repeats and remedial courses?**

*** What is the school's LOA policy? Procedures?**

How does the financial aid office monitor the student's enrollment status?

How is the financial aid office notified if the student is not making SAP?

*** Indicates that these areas may be also/only found in the Academic or Education/Personnel Office**

FEDERAL FAMILY EDUCATION LOAN (FFEL) PROGRAMS:

Are specific people responsible for certifying FFEL loans?

What is the criteria for certifying SLS instead of PLUS for dependent students?

How is the COA determined for a loan period (different programs)?

How is the FC determined for a loan period of other than 9 months (different programs)?

Staff Interview Questions (Cont'd)

FINANCIAL AID PERSONNEL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

Are loan amounts prorated?

What loan counseling is done and when? Is in-person exit counseling done before graduation?

*** Who awards/disburses financial aid -- grants and loan proceeds?** How and when?

*** Is a loan log book kept** (records the date the check is received from the lender, the date the check is released to the student and the date any check was returned or a refund was made)?

*** Describe the timing and amounts of the first and second disbursements, loan disbursement procedures, and what is checked prior to disbursing funds to the students' account/student.**

*** Are any FFEL funds maintained for the students' budgeting purpose?** Is an escrow account available for excess funds?

*** How does financial aid disbursement differ for students in different programs?**

* Indicates that this item may be found in the business office rather than the financial aid office.

FEDERAL PERKINS LOAN PROGRAM:

Where are Perkins promissory notes stored (should be in a fire-proof, locked cabinet)?

When do students sign for schedule of advances?

Explain how entrance and exit counseling is conducted for Perkins loan recipients?

Are repayment schedules given to students? Does the institution maintain a copy of the repayment schedule with the promissory note after the student leaves?

FEDERAL WORK-STUDY PROGRAM:

What types of FWS jobs do you have (if applicable, see off-campus agreements)? (Gather the job descriptions)

How are the hours the students worked monitored by a supervisor? (signed timesheets)

How are earnings monitored to ensure that the award was not exceeded?

What is the rate students are paid? (Cannot be less than the minimum wage)

How long do the students work per week? (Must be part-time employment)

What is done with credit balances on students' accounts?

Staff Interview Questions (Cont'd)

FINANCIAL AID PERSONNEL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

REFUNDS:

Explain the financial aid office's role in the school's refund procedures.

How is the financial aid office notified when a student has withdrawn?

Who completes the refund calculations? Who prepares/endorsees the refund check?

Where are the canceled refund checks maintained?

What refund policy is used? Do state/accrediting agency refund policies differ from Title IV minimums?

What are the refund deadlines and when are refunds calculated/made?

How is the business office or corporate office notified of refund amounts?

Do refund checks go through any type of approval process before they are sent to the lender?

DEFAULT MANAGEMENT PLAN:

(NOTE: see the Default Focus Checklist - APPENDIX 8)

What are the default rates? Is the school appealing the calculation of the rates?

If the rates are high, has the institution submitted a Default management plan to the Department or is the school required to implement Appendix D?

If Appendix D, how does financial aid office coordinate with other offices? Their roles?

Staff Interview Questions (Cont'd)

FISCAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Name _____
 Position/Title _____
 Award years in position _____
 Name of CPA _____
 Date/Time of Interview _____

General responsibilities as it relates to fiscal or business aspects of Title IV program administration Keep track of any additional documents requested.

The following questions are suggested for this interview process:

What is the role of the corporate office (if applicable) in the fiscal area? (separate EIN's, PIN's?)

Who requests the drawdowns (calls EDPMS for money)? How? What information do you receive from the financial aid office?

What is the basis you use for drawing down funds -- explain process. (Cash management plan/cash flow projections -- how do you determine how much cash to draw down?)

FEDERAL BANK ACCOUNTS

How many federal bank accounts does the school maintain? Into which account are the federal funds deposited?

Are the federal bank accounts regularly reconciled? How often?

Are the bank accounts interest bearing? If so, is interest (other than for a Federal Perkins Loan fund) returned to ED? How is this interest returned? (by check or through the PMS 272 report?)

How are the accounts identified at the bank (with word "Federal")?

Are there any bank service or other charges on the Federal accounts?

Who does the bank reconciliations between the ledgers and bank statements?

GENERAL

When are FSEOG, Perkins, and FWS matches made? How are they calculated?

Does the institution ever have excess cash on hand? If so, why?

Has your institution utilized all its allocated funds? If not, why?

Does the institution keep a separate Title IV account, ledger, and chart of accounts?

Who keeps the general ledger and/or Title IV ledger/journal?

Staff Interview Questions (Cont'd)

FISCAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

Who does the reporting on the PMS 272 and FISAP to the Department? What methodology?

From what campus-based program does the institution take its administrative cost allowance (ACA)? (see institution's FISAP) How is the ACA calculated? (if applicable)

Who does the account reconciliations with the PMS 272, FISAP, SPS, and ledgers? How often? Explain process.

Who can explain your institution's accounting system?

How and when are disbursements made to students? (after how many units/hours?) How are students notified that their checks have arrived?

Do you keep a FFEL check log or some other method for recording the date the institution: received the FFEL checks from the lender, the date the institution releases the check to the student, the date a loan disbursement check is returned to the lender, and the date a refund is made? (If so, ask for a copy of this.)

How does the financial aid office inform the business office when to pay checks or hold checks?

For what reasons would a check be held?

Are all check negotiations documented? Does the school ever just endorse the check and release it to the student (for co-payable checks)?

Are student credit balances ever maintained on a student's account? Under what circumstances?

Who completes the refund calculations? Who prepares/writes the refund check?

How are refunds made? What refund policy is used?

When are refunds made for each of the Title IV programs?

Are copies of canceled or negotiated checks held at the institution? Where?

Has the school been on financial monitoring (determine from IDS first)?

What is the status of the financial statements? (current asset-to-liability ratios)

What are the procedures for monitoring outstanding checks?

How is information about financial aid received from sources other than Title IV (scholarships, JTPA, and employer tuition remission) coordinated with the financial aid office?

Does the institution delay the date it releases the loan proceeds for first time students?

Are there any current Title IV funding or reconciliation discrepancies or problems that we should know about?

Staff Interview Questions (Cont'd)

PLACEMENT OFFICER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Name _____

Position/Title _____

Award years in position _____

(Ask them to show forms associated with placement process. Request policies and procedures manual & other documents. Keep track of any additional documents requested.)

The following questions are suggested for this interview process:

Describe your job responsibilities.

What is the institution's default management plan?

If Appendix D, what activities has the person been doing to fulfill Section II, #1-3. (ie. Does the school have a liaison with the Private Industry Council? Federal Employment Development agency?)

Does the school communicate with its accrediting agency about improvements to its job placement rate?

Do all students receive placement assistance? When?

How do you know which students are ready to receive placement assistance?

Does the school have placement waivers?

Do students receive instruction in interviewing, resumes, or career development?

What is the placement rate (different programs)?

How is this rate determined?

Are these rates published and made available to students?

What are the placement procedures?

How are placement contacts established?

Does the institution have a professional advisory council or committee?

Are there any branch campuses or other locations in which students receive instruction?

What sort of reports does the institution prepare for the accrediting agency or state licensing agency regarding placement?

Is there a separate placement file?